Laubenheimer was an Early Fairbury Business Leader

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Peter Laubenheimer was one of Fairbury's first business leaders. Unfortunately, he developed mental issues late in life, and his own daughter had to shoot him in self-defense.

The story of the Laubenheimer family began with the birth of Philip Laubenheimer in 1803 in Germany. In 1824, Philip Laubenheimer married Gertrude Starck in Germany. Philip and Gertrude Starck had seven children. One of these children, Justus Peter Laubenheimer, was born in 1832 in Germany.

In 1842, the Philip Laubenheimer family emigrated from Germany to Richfield, Wisconsin. The Laubenheimer family was among the first settlers in the Richfield area. Unfortunately, Philip's wife and one child died just a few weeks after arriving in Richfield.

Philip Laubenheimer eventually built a tavern that also served as a trading store. He became friends with Solomon Laurent Juneau (1793-1856). Mr. Juneau was a French Canadian fur trader and politician who helped found the city of Milwaukee. Philip had no issues with Native Americans because of Mr. Juneau's good relationship with these people.

Peter Laubenheimer was just ten years old when his family emigrated to Richfield. He worked in lumber camps and on the railroad for a dollar a day. In 1845, Peter's father married for a second time. Philip married Annie M. Arnet. Philip and Annie Laubenheimer had five children. Peter was 13 years old when his father remarried.

John T. Borngasser Sr. (1828-1884) was a pioneer settler in the LaSalle area, and he ran a very successful butcher shop. He married Katherine Werling. In 1862, his wife's younger brother, Ludwig "Louis" Werling, became a butcher in Borngasser's shop. That same year, Peter Laubenheimer went to LaSalle and learned the butcher's trade in Borngasser's shop. John T. Borngasser Sr. was the great-grandfather of prominent Fairbury citizen Carl L. Borngasser (1937-2023).

In 1865, Peter Laubenheimer and Louis Werling moved from LaSalle to Fairbury and opened a meat market. Peter was 33, and Louis was 23 years of age. Peter constructed a building at the corner of Second and Locust, which became known as the Peter Laubenheimer building. This building was likely at the northwest corner of Second and Locust Streets.

Thirty-eight-year-old Peter Laubenheimer married 18-year-old Anna Mary Billhartz in 1870 in Ottawa. They lived in Fairbury on Elm Street and had five children. Their

daughter, Hattie Laubenheimer, died at the age of five months. The children who lived to be adults were Annie, Harry P., Golda, and William P. Laubenheimer.

The Laubenheimer and Werling business partnership lasted for 18 years until 1883. Both men amicably ended the partnership when Laubenheimer was 51 years of age.

Peter Laubenheimer then purchased 480 acres of land. His land was southeast and east of the Fairbury city boundaries in that era. Portions of this land were next to the TP&W railroad tracks running east from Fairbury.

In 1872, the Chicago & Paducah railroad laid its tracks from Streator and Pontiac to Fairbury. This track entered Fairbury about where the old Honegger mill is located on the west side of Fairbury. This railroad was later renamed the Wabash.

In September 1887, a Wabash train entered Fairbury from the north and then proceeded through Fairbury on the combined TP&W and Wabash railroad tracks at 10 miles per hour. Just as the train left Fairbury going east, it derailed onto the farm of Peter Laubenheimer. A passenger coach, mail car, express car, and a freight car derailed. The 20 people on the train escaped severe injury.

One of the sons of Peter and Anna Laubenheimer was William "Will" Laubenheimer. In 1901, when Will was 19, he discovered some buried money while digging in the cellar of his father's home. The paper money had disintegrated, but Will found 12 silver dollars and one silver quarter. The coins were made in 1854 and 1855. Today, a 1854 silver dollar would be worth about $1,676.

In 1906, Peter Laubenheimer was 74 years of age. In recent years, his family had noticed that Peter's mind had begun to weaken. Peter began making threats against various people and family members.

In November of 1906, Peter Laubenheimer got into an argument with prominent Fairbury banker Herbert Powell about some financial matter. Mr. Laubenheimer then attacked Mr. Powell with a knife. Mr. Laubenheimer was charged with one count of assault with the intent to kill and two counts of assault with a deadly weapon. Mr. Laubenheimer made a plea bargain and pleaded guilty to one count of assault with a deadly weapon. He had to pay a $500 fine. That fine amount would be equivalent to $18,220 in today's dollars.

In November of 1908, Mrs. Laubenheimer went to Nevada to visit her son William. Miss Golda Laubenheimer, 28 years of age, was left in Fairbury to care for her aging father, and Peter threatened her several times over imagined things. One day, Golda opened some windows to air out the house. Peter accused her of wasting heat and tried to hit her on the head with a water pitcher. Golda eluded her father until he calmed down.

A short time later, Golda was in the basement adding coal to the furnace. Mr. Laubenheimer got angry and took the shovel away from Golda. He then tried to hit Golda with the shovel. Golda then consulted an attorney about her dire situation. The attorney

recommended that Golda carry a revolver to protect herself if the worst came. Family pride sealed Golda's lips, keeping her from talking to non-family members about her situation.

Golda followed her attorney's advice and began carrying a revolver at all times. A few days later, Peter started throwing chairs at Golda and threatened her life. To stop her father from harming her, Golda fired two shots over his head to warn him to stop. The warning shots did no good. Golda was forced to shoot her father and flee the home in fear for her life. Peter Laubenheimer survived the shooting. The general public in Fairbury sympathized with Golda having to shoot her father in self-defense. There were no medications and no nursing homes to treat patients with mental illness in that era. Families had to deal with aging parents as best as they could.

A few months later, Mrs. Laubenheimer died at the age of 57. She was buried at Graceland Cemetery. Peter Laubenheimer then moved to Springfield to live with his daughter Anna and her husband. Peter Laubenheimer died in Springfield in 1910 at the age of 78. He was buried by his wife in Fairbury's Graceland Cemetery.

Peter Laubenheimer was one of Fairbury's first business leaders. His life story also illustrates the difficulties of dealing with old-age mental illnesses in the era before medicines and nursing homes.

Phillips Gallery photo of Golda Laubenheimer. She had to shoot her father in self-defense because of his mental illness. Black and white photo colorized by AI (Artificial Intelligence).